Communities Come to the Broadband Starting Line

Cities prioritize broadband to drive economic development by attracting and retaining businesses and residents.

Broadband funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is becoming available, and local towns and cities now see affordable broadband as an economic development tool.

This comes at a time when many still lack access to affordable broadband. According to a 2021 BroadbandNow study, 42 million Americans can't purchase broadband internet.

In this issue, BROADBAND COMMUNITIES is looking at three cities using broadband to attract and retain residents and businesses:

- **Albuquerque, New Mexico:** Albuquerque will have a citywide fiber network supporting consumers and smart-city applications such as gunshot detection thanks to its partnership with Vexus Fiber.
- **Ellensburg, Washington:** Ellensburg is partnering with Consolidated Communications to migrate DSL-based customers to fiber-based 2 Gbps service.
- **Pharr, Texas:** Upon completing its fiber network, the city shed its first-place designation on the list of the nation's top five "worst-connected" cities.

These cities will also create new jobs. For example, Vexus Fiber plans to hire 200 people in the first phase of its network build and create 300 local construction jobs and 150 permanent local jobs.

LEVERAGING ACP

In areas with low-income populations, communities and providers are leveraging the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which provides subsidies up to $30 a month toward internet services for eligible recipients. Albuquerque and Pharr are among the communities taking advantage of the program. In Albuquerque, Vexus Fiber offers a $30-a-month subsidy if a household earns less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In Pharr, residents are offered gigabit service for $20 a month with ACP.

BOOSTING BUSINESS

Bringing broadband into a community will also enhance the business economy. CenterFuse, Ellensburg's Business Development Authority, found in its 2021 broadband study that "business vitality requires strong internet service both to businesses and residents since employees and workers expect home internet to be as good as it is at work." Ellensburg's new fiber network with Consolidated will allow it to serve residents, a burgeoning student housing market and remote workers. Pharr's broadband network will support residents and global manufacturers located on the Mexican border.

These communities share a common thread: Broadband is an economic stimulant. With so many coming to the starting line, is your community ready to enter the broadband race? ❖

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